

Using Movie Trailers to Improve Oral Skills of Primary School Pupils with a Role Play Approach

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Abstract

The paper presents an experience of English language learning by 10 years children attending the last year of primary school and in particular an extra curricular project focused on oral skills. Listening and speaking by working with movie trailers offered by the teacher and chosen by the students themselves using technologies such as the projector, the computer, the use of the Internet. As an alternative to curricular program it was decided to design a didactic intervention based on the technique of the role play and simulations. The choice was made according to two different students' needs: the desire to try to understand the original language films that pupils have already seen and to be able to watch films not yet seen, accepting the challenge of making it directly in English. To avoid making the activity meaningless, it was decided to familiarize learners with this type of work by offering them various movie trailers with and without the option of subtitles. At the end of each task were administered post-listening teaching activities consisting of: summary, cloze, quiz by using the computer and freeware software for exercises. Students learn at different rates and have different learning styles. Technology helps to relate the curriculum to life outside the classroom. The main purpose of the activity was to bring as much as possible the students to aspects of oral language: intonation, accent, pronunciation, rhythm. Apart from the fun aspect that has entertained and motivated students, has provided a rich vocabulary that is not often found in textbooks. Given the tendency of the Italian school classrooms structuring of multimedia technology, this experience stands as an encouragement to classrooms in aspects of oral language through simple activities that can also be chosen by the students themselves.

1. Introduction

We are used to listen to the statement that the best way to learn a language is to go abroad and above all in the country where the target language is spoken. This is true but even if different agreements are signed between schools of different countries to allow students to experiment English language in realistic situations with their peers, children of primary schools in South Italy have very low possibilities to go abroad. For this reason it is important to arrange stimulating activities in language classes by using new technologies. In this work we will present an experience of English learning by children of a primary school in alternative situations respect to the traditional lesson.

Increasing the use of new technologies like the Internet, You Tube, digital TV and interactive DVDs in language learning is the object of several projects in the Italian school. An example is the "Divertinglese", a collaboration and integration between TV and the web, created and developed by Rai Educational and Italian Ministry for Education for children in primary school in order to teach the English language with a playful approach. Video and audiotape materials have been used extensively to teach English as Second Language (ELS) classes [1] and there are a lot of free websites with excellent source of authentic English with dialogues, idioms, slang and other rich example of language [2]. In the present work, through the use of trailers of famous movies (including animated films) chosen together with the students, we focus on young learners trying to role play some video clips in an atmosphere that has promoted the linguistic expression. Accuracy and proficiency were not requested to pupils. The Italian Education Directions ("Indicazioni nazionali per il curricolo della scuola dell'infanzia e del primo ciclo di istruzione") states that *with regard to the English language in primary school, the teacher will take into account the increased capacity of the child spontaneously to appropriate pronunciation and intonation patterns to enable more naturally a multilingual system.*

*In language learning motivation comes from the natural attitude of pupils to communicate, socialize, interact and their natural propensity to "do with the language."*¹

¹ Per quanto riguarda la lingua inglese nella scuola primaria, l'insegnante terrà conto della maggiore capacità del bambino di appropriarsi spontaneamente di modelli di pronuncia e intonazione per attivare più naturalmente un sistema plurilingue. Nell'apprendimento delle lingue la motivazione nasce dalla naturale attitudine degli alunni a comunicare, socializzare, interagire e dalla loro naturale propensione a "fare con la lingua" (<http://www.indicazioninazionali.it/JJ/>)



Moreover, both the Common Framework of European Languages and the European Commission Strategies consider the ability "to do with a language" an important objective to promote the Plurilingualism.

The descriptors of the scale are pragmatic because they define what a learner should be able to do with the language, understood not as a closed system and the abstract, but as concrete and dynamic tool designed to perform actions in a context of communicative interaction. Making language in real situations may help young pupils to learn English not to achieve fluency, that is not requested to them, but to spontaneously appropriate models of pronunciation and intonation to get started on, more naturally a multilingual system.

2. Learning language with movies

Listen to music and watching a film in original language have been a popular use to facilitate language learning in an intermediate or advanced level ([3,4,5,6]. Unfortunately in Italy all international movies and TV programs are dubbed in Italian language. But now thanks to the advent of new technologies is possible to extend this practice also to elementary level and even to primary school, by taking advantage of the multiple language tracks available on DVDs.

It is possible to play a DVD with the language we want to learn with or without subtitles. Note that early learners are not able to watch a whole movie without subtitles since they run into too much unfamiliar language. Moreover they are not able/used to read the subtitles not even in their own language because they sometimes run very fast. For this reason, movie trailers and movie clips without subtitles were used in the laboratory in order to reduce the effort of understanding foreign language and enable the process of learning by input [7].

The expected results are not the learning of correct written English sentences (as in reading activity) but the assimilation of correct oral sentences and the acquirement of the prosodic features of the language as rhythm, intonation, accent that are the main difficult aspects of the oral language. Our work is not limited to watch the film and to memorize some sentences but to role play some scenes memorizing some keywords but above all trying to act spontaneously by using what has been already learnt. For this activity movie trailer are an added value since they are concise, they allow people a short and quick immersion in the plot, they provide keywords and they have not copyright issues, so if in our classroom there is an Interactive Board we can use movie trailer easily. To promote oral skills, role play is a good activity, in fact, classroom environment increase the learner motivation to learn [8]. Studies about oral group activities [8,9] state that a relaxing setting provide the students with the opportunity to practice the language. In our laboratory the role play has been the cornerstone of the activity. At a primary school students are asked to learn vocabulary and to understand simple instructions without a real life experience of language. In our laboratory we provided students with the challenge to act pragmatically in order to survive linguistically (see McDonough [11]).

In the framework of the second language acquisition studies, learning by movies put into effect input and output. Moreover, the theory of communication, introduced by Hymes [17] in the United States and by Halliday [18] in England, carries out with the audio-lingual method the promotion of motivation and personality in second language learning also in young learners.

The present laboratory differs from the other investigations in literature [2,3,4,5,6,12,13,14] in that users are not adults but young learners with a low background and motivation.

3. Laboratory phase

To improve English competences in South Italy, European Commission funds extracurricular courses in the schools that have to apply with their own didactic projects. In the present case a short syllabus of "Drama English" addressed to students of a primary school aged 9-10 years, has been proposed by the school and funded by the PON organization². The extracurricular course consisted of 30 hours of didactic organized in ten lessons of three hours. The laboratory activity has involved students from different classes of the last year in primary school and two instructors: the curricular teacher (the tutor) and the author as the "expert teacher". Watching movie trailers and role play them was the activity chosen by the teacher and tutor. The students were involved in the choice of the movies series: Harry Potter, Madagascar, Ice Age, Shrek. In particular the movies of the Harry Potter series were particularly appreciated by learners.

The duration of the movie trailer is very short. Thus, in the same lesson several trailers could be watched. Since students knew them in their native language, it was easy to understand the plot and the sequence. The purpose of the activity was to detect the oral aspects of the language: accent, intonation and rhythm. After an introductory first meeting, each lesson was structured in the following way

² <http://pon.indire.it/portale/>



1. Brainstorming: the videos recorded in the previous lesson were showed to the students that could notice their own grammar or lexical mistakes but also be motivated by their performance in gesture and pronunciation
2. Pre-listening phase: a new movie trailer was selected by the expert teacher and students had to guess the movie by listening to the track of the trailer. This phase had principally a playful goal.
3. First watching the trailer without subtitles in order to discover the key words: the students had to complete a written exercise.
4. Role-play: students were sorted in different groups and choose a character to perform. They were free to choose a male or a female character indifferently of their own sex. After rehearsing for some minutes every part, they were called to perform the scene while they were recorded. It was playful and challenging and among groups rose a great cooperation in organizing the work and in choosing the role.
5. The phases 2-4 were repeated with another trailer and groups were reformed at any change of the movie.

In order to document the project, a final activity was chosen and reported in a multimedia DVD. The students chose a movie clip to re-act to test themselves in a scene not included in the trailer. They chose *Harry Potter and the sorcerer stone*, in particular the scene in the Hogward Express train when the principal character Harry makes friends with his two classmates. It is interesting to note that the theme chosen by the learners (presenting themselves and meeting new people) is one of the main competence required in curricular studies of foreign language in Italian primary school.

4. Achievements in Second Language Acquisition

Thanks to the continuous interaction between the curricular teacher and the expert, some critical issues have been analyzed. For example, the group included the child of a native speaker that refused to speak English during the curricular English course. Moreover, a lot of students were overcome by their shyness and they showed a low self confidence. During the experimentation the child with a native speaker dad started to communicate in English unconsciously, the shy pupils interacted without minding of their mistakes and lack of fluency. These results were confirmed by the curricular teacher that noticed a more confident approach to the English language in the curricular morning lessons:

According to the author, the key factors for the success of the laboratory were:

- a more suitable timetable of the class. In curricular classes English lessons last usually an hour and are distributed in two or three hours per week;
- the longer duration of the extracurricular course. In three hours it was possible to plan different activities working on listening, reading, writing and speaking abilities. And still having time for the practice performing in a relaxing atmosphere;
- the novelty for students to approach spoken English through multimedia with respect to the traditional lessons they were used to;
- maintaining a relaxing atmosphere in the classes as a main goal of the experimentation considering that cognitive, social and emotional factors play an important role in the learning process;
- the use of role play. Movie scenes and animated films are not real life but allow students to think of themselves as people in an environment and not more students in a classroom. It is not authentic teaching material but students learn to do things by doing them;
- the ability of ten years students to learn spontaneously pronunciation, rhythm, accent and intonation.

Almost all the children involved in the laboratory achieved the A1 level of competence thanks to this didactic experience even if it was not a goal of the proposed course.

In foreign language classrooms it is often a challenge to utilize potentially useful technology but if teachers are willing to work with Internet there are interesting on line audiovisual resources that offer the possibility to create exciting lessons [15]. In Italy since 2009 the Education System has been providing schools with Interactive Board and teachers are trained to use it. For Foreign language acquisition this is a big advantage because the use of technology in class generates greater students autonomy and lifelong language learning skills [16] above all in lower level of competence. In particular in this work the potentiality of movie trailer for young learner has been examined with excellent results in students' performance. Thus our experiment can be implemented also in curricular courses of English for young learners.

5. Conclusions

Although in literature there is a vast resource of the introduction of movie trailers in second language acquisition classes, not much experiences investigate the role of audio visual for young learners, above all for primary schools students. In this paper the possibility to work with young learners through movie trailers has been examined. A lot of positive results have been discovered both in performance in oral skill and in motivation and self confidence also in children previously reluctant to talk in English. Almost all the children involved in the laboratory achieved the A1 level of competence thanks to this didactic experience even if it was not a goal of the proposed course. We think that the proposed didactic strategy can be adopted also in curricular courses if it is planned in advance and preserving the ludic aspect. In particular, as observed in our work, the possibility to choose the subject, write the scenes, try the role, set up the scenes by the students themselves, allows to facilitate the memorization process, to improve non verbal communication and to increase students' motivation.

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